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ABSTRACT

Four Hundred and twenty-nine students enrolled in nine women's studies courses and 72 students (a comparison group) enrolled in an undergraduate psychology class were compared on demographic and attitudinal variables relating to educational plans and goals, women's issues and course evaluation, as well as the Bem measure of female stereotyping and the Tennessee Self Concept Scale. Using statistical analyses, results showed that women's studies courses are of interest largely to women, are taught mostly by women, and are offered by and taken by individuals in Arts and Humanities and Behavioral and Social Sciences. Students perceive the courses as rigorous, and report an increased awareness of sex roles and the situation of women in society as a result of taking the courses. However, no significant changes in self-concept over one semester could be attributed to taking the courses. Methodological problems and a discussion of findings in relation to previous research are provided. (Author/MSE)

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AN EVALUATION OF A WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

Sharon A. Shueman and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 6-76

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Summary

429 students enrolled in nine women's studies courses and 72 students (comparison group) enrolled in an undergraduate psychology class were compared on demographic and attitudinal variables relating to educational plans and goals, women's issues and course evaluation, as well as the Bem measure of female stereotyping (androgeny) and the Tennessee Self Concept Scale. Using Chi square and F at .05, results showed that women's studies courses are of interest largely to women, are taught mostly by women, and are offered by and taken by individuals in Arts and Humanities and Behavioral and Social Sciences. Students perceive the courses as rigorous, and report an increased awareness of sex roles and the situation of women in society as a result of taking the courses. However, no significant changes in self concept over one semester could be attributed to taking the courses. Methodological problems and a discussion of findings in terms of previous research are provided.

The Women's Studies program at the University of Maryland, College Park began in the Spring of 1974, partly in response to a nationwide increase in the study of the female experience, and partly in response to a need which was shown to exist among students at the University of Maryland, College Park campus (Herman and Sedlacek, 1973). Herman and Sedlacek found that 86% of the students surveyed saw a need for Women's Studies courses, and 57% said they would take a Women's Studies course if it were offered.

The program at the College Park campus has grown rapidly, with 15 undergraduate and 2 graduate level courses in 12 different academic departments being offered under the title Women's Studies during the Fall semester, 1975-76.

Rapid growth is also the pattern nationwide. In 1974 there were approximately 4,000 such courses offered at American colleges and universities. Women's Studies has come a long way since the institution of the first formal program at San Diego (California) State College in the Spring of 1970. Interest in the area has reached even into the high schools.

In an area whose existence itself is controversial (Astin and Parelman, 1973), such rapid growth raises issues which must be dealt with, e.g., the academic accountability within these courses, the effects of such course experience on students, or the usefulness of a Women's Studies major in the job market or in graduate school.

In response to these issues, many of the organizers and administrators of Women's Studies courses nationwide have become interested in course and program evaluation. Difficulties, both methodological and ideological, are being encountered in evaluation attempts. In an article describing the first Women's Studies Evaluation Conference, held in June of 1973, at Wesleyan (Connecticut) University, the authors explain:

> "As we listed the goals of women's studies courses, we realized the overwhelming expectations for both student and teacher; beyond teaching new facts, we wanted courses to raise the self-acceptance and aspirations of our students, to encourage their active involvement in women's issues, to evolve new research methods and new classroom techniques, to alter the very nature of our disciplines. Success in achieving such aims would be difficult to measure, but their very scope made evaluation especially important." (Borod, Dorsky, Hull and Keller, 1974, p.9)

The goals are ambitious and far-reaching. Evaluation in such a case is a complex task.

Previous Evaluation

Yamoor, Mishchenko, & Martin (1973) did a survey of evaluative studies of Women's Studies courses at colleges and universities throughout the U.S. They surveyed the 125 instructors of these courses listed in the Modern Language Association's 1970 *Guide to Current Female Studies*. They found that very little had been done in the evaluation of these courses. Forty-four percent of the instructors who had been surveyed responded. Only 16% of these had done any formal evaluation of their classes and what had been done was not very good. The authors concluded that:

> "Courses on women and Women's Studies Departments is a new and growing field, with courses multiplying rapidly and sometimes haphazardly. Evaluation seems not to have had a chance to keep up with this growth. Feedback indicates a highly favorable reaction from students, but instructors have lacked time and research competence to conduct evaluation yielding objective data (p.9)."

These three authors did their own evaluation of the effects of a course entitled "Life Styles of Educated Women" on the students in the class. Their study, however, suffers from the same problems for which they blame others: they had no comparison group, and they did no pre-measure. They used a questionnaire which they themselves had developed, and they relied on self-report and the students' own perceptions of how the course had affected them.

White, Gold, & Brush (1974), at Wesleyan University, investigated the effects of an interdisciplinary Women's Studies course on the attitudes and behaviors of the students in that course. They found a change in self-concept (more awareness of oneself as a woman, and a change toward a more feminine self-concept), and a more positive attitude toward feminism. They used two standardized inventories to measure the attitudes, and did a pre and post-measurement ; however, they used no comparison group.

A study which did employ a comparison group was conducted by Speizer (1975) at a junior college in Boston in the Spring of 1974. Speizer used the Spence and Helmreich *Attitude Toward Women Scale (AWS)* as a pre and post-measure of women's attitudes toward women. Her experimental group consisted of 38 women who were enrolled in two sections (with different instructors) of a women's studies course, and her comparison group consisted of 123 women who were enrolled at the college that semester, but who were not enrolled in that particular women's studies course. Both groups took the AWS on two occasions.

Speizer found that women who participated in the women's studies course had a significantly greater change on their AWS scores (reflecting a heightened awareness of sex-role stereotypic attitudes toward women) than did those women in the comparison group. This change in attitudes among the experimental group was not related to such variables as: rank in family, whether they came from all girl families, choice of career or major, or having a mother who worked outside the home.

Speizer also concluded that change in attitudes was more likely related to course content, rather than instructor, since there was no significant difference between the two sections of the experimental course.

The Problem

The present study is an attempt to evaluate some apsects of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Maryland, College Park.

This evaluation is concerned mainly with some input and output dimensions of the program. Certainly, not all dimensions could be examined in one study; for example, there was no attempt to consider learning environment or long-term effects. Emphasized are the structure of the program and a description of students (input variables), and an evaluation of the short-term effects of the courses on attitudes and self-concepts of the students (output variables).

Input Variables

The formal program in Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, allows a student to gain a certificate in Women's Studies (there was no major in Women's Studies at the time of this study) by completing 21 hours of core and elective courses from a group of approximately 50 courses. These courses are taught by the faculty of 20 different academic departments of the University (the Women's Studies Program has no faculty of its own, since it is not at present an academic department). In addition to these courses, there are at present approximately 20 support courses which may be chosen, with approval, as electives (a support course is one including a unit on women, a text on women, or lectures pertaining to women).

Of the courses included above, approximately 80% are taught by women. The majority of the courses are offered by two of the seven divisions of the University: Behavioral and Social Sciences (approximately 45%) and Arts and Humanities (approximately 35%). The remaining courses are offered by departments within the Division of Human and Community Resources.

The following is a description of the students who registered for Women's Studies courses during one semester: Of the 1,386 students who registered for Women's Studies courses during the Spring, 1975 semester, 1,022 (74%) completed the courses, 327 (24%) dropped the courses, 29 (2%) cancelled their registrations, and 8 (less than 1%) withdrew from the University. The students who

registered for these courses represented the following academic divisions of the University: Behavioral and Social Sciences (34%), Arts and Humanities (19%), Human and Community Resources (19%), and General Studies (12%). Each of the other undergraduate divisions were represented by less than 5% of the total number of students who registered for Women's Studies courses.

A large portion (25%) of the students who enrolled for Women's Studies courses had transferred to the University of Maryland from other undergraduate institutions. Only 2% of the registrants were not seeking a degree from the University of Maryland. Of the registrants, 18% were freshmen, 19% were sophomores, 26% were juniors, 28% were seniors, 4% were graduate students, and 1% special students (3% were unclassified). A majority (82%) of the students were female, and a slightly larger proportion of female students than male students were married (females 10%, males 7%). Student's ages ranged from 17 to 61, with the median and modal (25%) age being 21.

The students who registered for all Spring, 1975 courses at the University represented the following academic divisison:[1] Behavioral and Social Sciences (26%), Arts and Humanities (15%), Human and Community Resources (20%), General Studies (12%), Agriculture and Life Sciences (13%), Mathematics, Physical Sciences and Engineering (9%), and Allied Health (5%). Approximately 54% of the enrolled students were men and 46% women. By class, registrants were: freshmen 29%, sophomores 19%, juniors 21%, seniors 18%, special students 2%, and unclassified 10%.

As might be expected, the enrollment in Women's Studies courses is overrepresented with women and with students from the divisions of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities. There is also an underrepresentation of students from the divisions of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Math, Physcial Sciences and Engineering, and Allied Health, although the latter three divisions

[1]Data provided by the Data Research Center, UMCP

offer no courses in the Women's Studies program.

Output Variables

In this study, the output variables of the program were examined with respect to the goals which the program organizers had set. Three objectives, included in the proposal for certification by the Women's Studies Advisory Committee (1975) were:

A. to examine conscious and uncounscious myths about women.

B. to help all concerned people cope with the rapid changes taking place in society and also in relations between the sexes.

C. to help women students realistically assess their life goals, abilities, and aptitudes, and to plan an education compatible with them by: (1) helping women and men understand the pressures and biases which have influenced their lives thus far, (2) discovering whether their current goals and plans result from true interest or from cultural expectations and sex stereotyping

With respect to these goals, this study investigated the changes which students enrolled in Women's Studies courses perceived in themselves, in addition to changes in their self-concepts, as measured by two standardized inventories.

Method

Four instruments were used. The first, a brief questionnaire developed for this study, gathered some demographic data, information on educational and career plans, goals which the students had for the course, and information reflecting students' activity (coming into the courses) in areas of women's issues. This questionnaire was administered to all experimental and comparison subjects during the first two weeks of classes.

The second questionnaire measured students' attitudes toward the course and the effect of the course on themselves, and it was administered to all subjects during the last week of the semester.

The remaining two measures were a measure of the concept of psychological androgeny, or feminine stereotyping (Bem, 1974), and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965), in which the total positive score was used. These two are standard measures which were administered to all subjects at the beginning and

the end of the semester.

Subjects and Courses

Subjects in the experimental group were 429 students (the entire enrollment) in nine of the 15 undergraduate Women's Studies courses being offered during the Fall semester of 1975-76 at the University of Maryland, College Park. The courses were given in eleven different departments and included undergraduate and graduate offerings which were chosen to be representative of all the Women's Studies courses. Two of the courses in this study, Sex Roles and Women in American Society Before 1865 were large (N=159 and 109, respectively) lecture classes, while the other seven were of smaller enrollment (range: 7-38, mean 23) and often did not follow a lecture format. The comparison group consisted of 72 students in an undergraduate psychology course on personality theory offered in Fall, 1975-76. Both experimental and comparison groups were 90% white and 6% black, with a median age of 20, although the experimental group was 85% female and the comparison group was 70% female. The experimental group was more likely to be ultimately pursuing a medical or law degree, although the experimental group felt it more likely they would stop working if they had preschool children (59% vs. 33%), and the comparison group students felt they were more likely to work continuously (56% vs. 27%). Differences were significant at .05 using Chi square.

Results

Significantly more (Chi square at .05) students in the experimental group indicated both having taken a course in Women's Studies (46% vs. 11%) while at the University and having read books or scholarly journal articles dealing with women's issues outside of classroom requirements (76% vs. 60%).

Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations of attitude item responses. As can be seen, there were no differences between the comparison and experimental group in their responses to items 1, 3, 15 or 16, those items being of an evaluative nature and reflecting some aspects of student satisfaction with the course.

The items which did show significant differences can be classified as those reflecting the development of an awareness of women's (and men's) sex roles. One may conclude that participation in a Women's Studies course provides for the development of such awareness in students, and to this extent, fulfills the stated goal set forth in the Women's Studies certificate proposal.

While no behavioral measures were included in this study, items 19-22 were meant to indicate students' intentions to exhibit certain behaviors. As shown in Table 1, the students in the Women's Studies courses were significantly more positive in their responses to items reflecting intention to: read books or scholarly journals concerned with women's issues, get involved with an organization concerned with women's issues, or work for social change in areas of women's concerns, all as a result of the courses.

While the experimental students were more likely to be aware of bias in other departmental courses (item 8), there was no difference in the tendency to voice objections to biased classroom presentations (item 22).

The remaining items on which there were no significant differences between groups reflect more of a personal change on the part of the student, i.e., reconsidering of life goals or life plans, a change in feelings about the self, or change with respect to an intimate relationship. This result is reinforced by the results on the Tennessee Self-Concept and Bem scales: neither of which reflected significant differences between the experimental and comparison groups or a change between the pre and post-testing periods (F-.05).

Discussion

To some extent the results of this study underline what was expected. t this point in the development of Women's Studies, the courses are of interest largely to women, are taught mostly by women, and are offered by as well as taken by individuals within the areas of Arts and Humanities and Behavioral and Social Sciences.

One of the issues often discussed with respect to any new academic program is the question of accountability; i.e., are the new (and what are sometimes considered faddish) courses as academically rigorous as the established courses? Students perceive the courses examined in this study as being as rigorous as other courses of similar levels at the University, and also perceive them as being worthwhile and fulfilling their expectations (goals).

We can talk of two kinds of changes that could be brought about by a course experience in Women's Studies. One is a development of general awareness of sex roles and the situation of women in society. The findings indicate that such awareness is a result of the Women's Studies courses. The other type of change possible is a personal change for the student (this may include a change in self-concept or a change in one's attitudes toward oneself). The evidence does not show that a one semester experience in a Women's Studies course fosters such a change any more than a one semester experience in the comparison group course (in this case, a personality and adjustment course).

One comment concerning the comparison group is appropriate here. The comparison group may, in one way at least, have been an inappropriate control. The subject matter of such a course may have been such that it encourages (more than that of, for example, an economics course) self-examination and reflection in much the same way that a Women's Studies course does; so the individuals in each group may be expected to experience some change. In such a case one might expect no significant difference in responses to many items. With regard to the lack of significant change through the semester on the androgeny and Tennessee Self-Concept measures, it may be that one semester is too short a time for any significant change to occur and be reflected in a standardized measure.

Much future evaluative research is clearly called for. Changes that may take place in students for longer periods than a semester should be examined.

Also many differences among subgroups such as comparing minority and non-minority students or men and women could be studied. Additionally, the entire area of reactions of employers or graduate schools and the long term outcomes of majoring in or taking Women's Studies courses should be explored. Other research done at Maryland indicates that both men and women freshmen were ambivalent about the practicality of a Women's Studies major in finding a job (Bravy and Sedlacek, 1976). This would seem to be a major issue with which women's studies programs must deal.

When comparing the results of this study with those of previous research, it would be wise to keep in mind that the research cited in this study was all completed several years ago. This is not a long time, except in the context of the history of the discipline of Women's Studies. Women's Studies has become much more acceptable and accepted recently and is now attracting those who would not be as readily classifiable as the avant-garde. In essence, the population has likely changed. This fact should be kept in mind when comparing results of present and past research. If we find no changes in our present students, one possibility is that they are not as motivated to change.

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Table 1.

Means[1] and Standard Deviations of Attitude Item Responses

	Experimental Group		Comparison Group	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1. I believe that this course was worthwhile.	4.20	.58	4.11	.80
2. I intend to take another Women's Studies course.	3.17	1.01	3.20	.76
3. This course has given me competence in the intended subject area.	3.71	.67	3.77	.73
4. Since beginning this course, my relationship with a person with whom I have been intimate has become more positive.	3.06	.84	3.23	1.06
5. Since beginning this course, my relationship with a person with whom I have been intimate has become more negative.	2.49	1.12	2.26	.92
6. Since beginning this course I have changed my feelings about myself as a woman (man).	3.40	1.01	3.03	.92
7. Since taking this course I have come to like women more.	3.40*	.85	3.00*	.69
8. Since taking this course I have become aware of a bias in other courses in this department.	3.46*	.92	2.83*	.82
9. Since beginning this course I have begun to reconsider my life goal.	3.26	1.07	3.31	.96
10. Since taking this course I have become more aware of the myths which exist concerning women.	4.17*	.79	2.91*	.89
11. Since beginning this course I have begun to reconsider my career plans.	2.97	1.01	3.09	.95
12. Since beginning this course I have become more aware of options open to me in career and life plans.	3.31	.96	3.23	.91
13. Since beginning this course I have developed a better understanding of the pressures and biases which affect my life.	4.20*	.67	3.86*	.77

Table 1. (continued)

Means[1] and Standard Deviations of Attitude Item Responses

	Experimental Group		Comparison Group	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
14. My view of the relationship between men and women has changed since I began this course.	3.74*	.98	2.77*	.69
15. My goals for this course were realized.	3.54	.61	3.63	.84
16. This course was as academically rigorous as other courses of the same level which I have taken at the University.	3.77	1.19	3.74	1.04
17. Since taking this course I have come to feel more hopeless about the position of women in our society.	2.43	.88	2.40	.70
18. Since taking this course I have come to feel more hopeful about the position of women in our society.	3.69*	.76	3.11*	.68
As a result of this course:				
19. I intend to do reading in books or scholarly journals concerned with women's issues.	3.63*	.88	2.86*	.91
20. I intend to get involved with an organization concered with women's issues.	3.06*	.84	2.43*	.85
21. I intend to get involved in working for social change in areas of women's concerns.	3.09*	.74	2.57*	.98
22. I intend to voice objections if I see that other instructors are offering biased presentations of subject matter.	3.74	1.01	3.34	.91

[1] 1=strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree
* F significant at .05 level